

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 143 (2014) 25 – 30

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

CY-ICER 2014

Cultural Mediation And Young Women's Re-Entry In Secondary Schools In Eastern Uganda

Maimuna Aminah Nimulola ^{a*}^a Lecturer – Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda, P.O. Box 2555 Mbale-Uganda

Abstract

The study investigated the influence of cultural practices and social settings on young women's aspirations for schooling. A survey was conducted on re-entrants and non re-entrants, followed by life histories. Central tendency values on personal characteristics, schooling history, family background and home-school environment were compared, and variables found to be significant included: working status; class of study at leaving; extra years in class/school; reasons for leaving school; socioeconomic status; parents' marital status; mother's qualification; mother's occupation; father's occupation; rural/urban environment and quality of school attended. Findings suggest that coming from a low socioeconomic status family and rural environment reduced the women's chances of re-entering school. Teacher training programmes should equip teachers with skills on handling children from different cultural settings.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CY-ICER 2014.

Keywords: Culture and Girls' Schooling, School Re-entry, Sociocultural and Activity Theory;

1. Introduction

Girls' schooling has received considerable attention internationally (Jomtien [1]; Dakar [2]; UN Millennium General Assembly [4]). In Uganda, in 2012, the GER for secondary students was 28.2% of which the male and female GERs were 31.2% and 25.4% respectively (Uganda National Commission for UNESCO [5]). The government has through the national strategy for Girls' Education in Uganda put up several measures to enhance girls' participation in

* Corresponding author: Maimuna Aminah Nimulola. Tel.: +0-000-000-0000 ; fax: +0-000-000-0000 .
E-mail address: mayrora@yahoo.co.uk

schooling but no significant results have been attained. The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of social and cultural settings on young women's aspirations for re-entering school in Eastern Uganda. It aimed at finding out the: extent to which barriers and challenges to women's re-entry in secondary school were sociocultural; different types of social settings and interactions in relationships with schooling aspirations; and the cultural resources that are used by different family settings and how they were internalized by the women.

2. Sociocultural, activity and practice theories

The sociocultural and Activity Theory (SCAT) advocated by Lev. S. Vygotsky [6] and advanced by Alexei Leont'ev and Alexandra Luria is a unified set of concepts which state that human cognition, learning and development are processes that are: social and cultural rather than individual phenomena, are mediated, and involve human activities (Daniels [7]). These activities exist in relation to the rules, community and division of labour hence: activity system (Engestrom [8]); and in given contexts (Cole [9]).

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice uses the concepts of field, *habitus* and capital to analyse social relationships. *Habitus* refers to a socially constituted system of 'durable transposable' dispositions providing individuals with class-dependent, predisposed ways of relating to situations. Field is a structural system of social relations among individuals, institutions and groupings (Grenfell and James [10]). Capital is the social product of a field through which individuals carry out social intercourse, which functions because of the valuations made by the rules of the field. Capital investments may be in form of: recognition and power within the society (symbolic capital), formal education (cultural capital); social relationships (social capital); and mercantile (economic capital).

3. Studying culture and girls' schooling

A number of studies using the qualitative and mixed method approaches have examined girls' social relations in their families, schools and societies (Stephens [11]; Bunware [12]; Rose and Tembon [13]; Colclough, Rose and Tembon [14]; Muranga [15]). They took culture to be transmitted by members of the society and readily assimilated by the girls and analysed how sociocultural factors, such as cultural practices, beliefs and values influence girls' schooling. But as Strauss [16], p 11 argues, "... it is not enough to know what information people are exposed to; we also have to study how they internalize that information". That, is, what are the underlying processes through which society influences girls' aspirations for schooling? In this study, culture is regarded as the product of social life and activity [10], where individuals critically appropriate cultural artefacts that they and others produce.

4. Methodology

A mixed method approach was used where a survey was conducted on 151 re-entrants and 50 non re-entrants to compare and contrast their background characteristics. A multiple case study was then conducted on 30 re-entrants and non re-entrants and ten of their mothers to examine their life histories. Twenty-seven variables were constructed on personal characteristics, schooling history, family background, and home-school environment. Measures of central tendency were computed and compared for re-entrants and non re-entrants. Independent chi-square tests were performed on the variables to determine their significance on schooling status for the two subgroups.

5. Presentation and discussion of findings

Twelve out of the 27 variables were found to be significantly associated with secondary school re-entry as indicated in table 1.

5.1 Personal characteristics

In previous research, age was cited as one of the factors determining enrolment and persistence in school and it was generally found that the older the child, the lower the chances of being enrolled ([14]; Al-Samarrai and Peasgood [17]; Rose and Al-Samarrai [18]). In this study, the mean age at leaving for both re-entrants and non re-entrants was 16.50 and 16.93 years respectively but this difference was found to be insignificant. The religion of Islam was found to negatively influence girls' enrolment in certain parts of Africa due to parental attitudes towards Western based schooling and their preference for religious schools [13]. In this study, although the Muslims outnumbered Catholics

and Protestants constituting about a half of the number for both, re-entrants and non re-entrants, this difference was insignificant. This could be attributed to the fact that there is an increasing number of Muslim founded/managed schools in the Eastern region of Uganda and that parents of Muslim girls no longer regard schooling as a threat. Although marriage was found to be an obstacle to girls' schooling in many of the studies ([13]; [14]; Kwesiga [19]), it was not found to be the case for the women in this study who had left school due to pregnancy where their getting married had been as a consequence of leaving school. Instead, marriage was found to be associated with re-entering school among some of the cases in the study, either through support of the husband, or as a reaction to ill treatment from the husband. In this study, about one third of the women were working, and not re-entrants (40%) were more likely than re-entrants (13.7%) to be engaged in some kind of work. This is consistent with findings from previous studies ([13]; [14]; Bredie and Beeharry [20]). However, other than working for their natal families as was the case for children in the studies, the women worked for their own upkeep.

Table 1. Variables for Secondary School Re-entry and their Significance

Variable	Label	Significance
<i>agecats</i>	categories of respondents' ages	X
<i>religion</i>	religion of respondent	X
<i>marital</i>	marital status of respondent	X
<i>working</i>	working status of respondent	**
<i>worktyp</i>	type of work (for those working)	#
<i>ageleft</i>	categories of age at leaving school	X
<i>classout</i>	class of dropping out	**
<i>inscyr</i>	years in school	X
<i>xyrsisc</i>	number of years relatively extra	***
<i>yrsoch</i>	number of years out of school	X
<i>reason</i>	main reason for dropping out	**
<i>motives</i>	main reason for re-entering (for re-entrants)	#
<i>agrentr</i>	age at re-entry (for re-entrants)	#
<i>chaleng</i>	major challenge to re-entering	X
<i>plann</i>	future plans in three years' time	***
<i>socioec</i>	socioeconomic status of respondent's family	**
<i>parlive</i>	parents alive	X
<i>parmar</i>	marital status of parents	***
<i>mo_qual</i>	mother's qualification	***
<i>occ_mot</i>	mother's occupation	*
<i>fa_qual</i>	father's qualification	X
<i>occ_fat</i>	father's occupation	**
<i>urbanrr</i>	whether respondent lives in urban or rural	***
<i>dwellig</i>	where respondent resided during secondary school	X
<i>sibschl</i>	siblings' secondary schooling status	X
<i>stbschs</i>	availability of suitable schools	X
<i>schqual</i>	perceived quality of schools	***

* = Significant ($p \leq 0.05$); ** = Significant ($p \leq 0.01$); *** = Significant ($p \leq 0.001$)

x = Not significant ($p > 0.05$); **#** = Not tested because it did not cut across the two sub groups

5.2 Schooling history

Non re-entrants in this study had spent one extra year in a class of study compared to the re-entrants and once they left school, girls who stayed relatively longer in school were less likely to return to school. Most (47%) re-entrants had left school while in S.3 while one third of non re-entrants had left in S.1. and the lower the class of study at leaving school, the less likely one was to go back to schooling. This may be attributed to what the young women

feel they had benefited from school and also due to the time they feel they had to invest in school before enrolling for a course. Among the reasons for having left school, lack of fees accounted for 38.9% of all the young women's have left school, although the non re-entrants were more affected as 45.0% of them compared to 25.5% of the re-entrants left due to lack of money for school fees. On the other hand, 35.2% of all the young women had left school due to pregnancy and 51.0% of the re-entrants compared to 27.9% of non re-entrants had left for the same reason. This suggests that the probability of re-entering school was higher for those who had left due to pregnancy than for those who had left due to lack of money, suggesting that problems related to pregnancy or childbearing were easier to overcome compared to lack of money. After leaving school, the main challenges to re-entry were found to be: childcare for re-entrants and lack of money for fees for the non re-entrants although the difference was not statistically significant. Madhavan and Thomas [21] found that in South Africa, the lack of childcare other than pregnancy was a major challenge to young women's continuing with school. When asked about their plans for the future, most (52.9%) of the re-entrants mentioned that they intended to achieve a certificate, while 55.8% of the non re-entrants hoped to or were already in trading and training. The fact that most re-entrants hoped to acquire higher certificates demonstrates how cultural capital, in the form of qualifications may become devalued leading to inflation. From the life history interviews, some young women mentioned wanting to acquire 'more papers' because 'nowadays' without them one was not assured of a good job.

5.3 Family background

More than half (54.9%) of the re-entrants compared to only 27.0% of non re-entrants mentioned both of their parents having lived together at the time of the study. Findings from the qualitative section indicate that family wrangles were a major hindrance to young women's continuation with schooling. This was worsened if the girl came from a family with a low socioeconomic status. In the study, 60.8% of re-entrants compared to 31.5% of non re-entrants came from families of middle and high socioeconomic statuses. These findings confirm those from previous studies ([17]; [18]; [19]; [20]). Parental education is a source of cultural capital for children. Children from highly educated families are more likely to develop a high valuing of schooling than those from less highly educated families. Fifty three percent of re-entrants' mothers compared to 14.4% of the non re-entrants' had had some secondary schooling. This is consistent with most findings in the literature ([17]; [20]). However, fathers' qualifications did not have any significant influence on school. The kind of occupation determines the family income and the children's field of engagement where they are produced by, and expected to reproduce specific forms of working status. For re-entrants in this study, 11.8% of their fathers were more likely to be in professional occupations compared to 0.9% of non re-entrants. Mother's occupation as peasant was found to be negatively associated with re-entry where 46.8% of non re-entrants compared to 33.3% of re-entrants had their mothers as peasants. A study by Kwesiga [19] also found that high levels of parental occupation increase girls' chances of schooling. Although several studies found the presence of siblings to increase the probability of a child's schooling ([13]; [14]; [17]), this was not found to be the case in this study. The schooling status of the women's siblings was a rather mixed one in that a woman could have siblings who never completed secondary schooling, those who had completed and others who were still in secondary. Findings from the qualitative section reveal that for those women from low socioeconomic status families, their chances of completing secondary school were limited if they had siblings in higher classes of secondary schooling as priority of paying school fees was given to them. The siblings' influence however changes if they have successfully completed secondary schooling where they become a source of cultural and social capital.

5.4 Home-school environment

In this study, 76.6% of non re-entrants compared to 35.3% of re-entrants were residing in rural areas during their secondary schooling. Other studies also found that parents from rural areas may not be in position to afford paying school fees for some or all of their children and also, most children in rural areas are required to stay at home or in work places so as to raise money for the family ([11]; [14]; [19]; Kirungi, [22]). This study found differences in culture between urban and rural settings based on structural organizations that emerged from the different activities that these societies engaged in. Coupled with the above is the fact that there is inadequate supply of schools in rural areas. In the 'field' of schooling where value is placed on grades attained in examinations, joining a reputable secondary school for the young women in this study depended on good Primary Leaving Examinations results usually from 'quality' schools, and their survival in the 'game' also depended on their performance at school. Almost half (54.9%) of the young women perceived the quality of school to have been poor and 65.8% of non re-

entrants compared to 31.4% of re-entrants were of this view. Almost two thirds (63.0%) of the non re-entrants had to travel long distances or move from home in order to have access to school. Previous literature has also mentioned inadequate structures and facilities as discouraging children from schooling ([11]; [14]). Besides providing or depriving basic scholastic facilities, schools for women in this study had tacitly created different values for schooling in the young women.

6. Conclusion

The above analysis suggests that: coming from a low socioeconomic status family in a rural environment and having attended a poor school reduced the chances of a woman's re-entering secondary school. The situation is worsened if the woman's parents were not living together at the time of her schooling and if the mother's education is low and she does not have a substantive source of income. The woman's chances of going back to school are further reduced if she had conceived while at school, left school in low class, and if she was working. The women's aspirations shaped by the social class (through class habitus) that they belonged to, which was in turn shaped by the activities of the young women. Besides the traditional roles of parents related to the paying of fees and guiding the child in school-related activities, this study found the role of parents to be mediational. They acted as agents of mediation by cultivating class *habitus* among their children, in form of dispositions.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom for funding my Ph.D. study on which this paper is based, and the British Council for the support provided during my stay in the United Kingdom. I equally thank the Islamic University in Uganda for seconding me for the scholarship and for facilitating the presentation of this work.

References

- Jomtien. (1990). Education for all. Retrieved August 3, 2004
- http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/jomtien_declatation.shtml
- United Nations. (1995). Beijing declaration and platform for action, *Fourth World Conference on Women*, UN: New York.
- UNESCO. (2000). *Dakar framework for action*. Retrieved August 3, 2004 from http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/framework.shtml
- United Nations. (2000). UN millennium development goals. Retrieved August 3, 2004 from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
- Uganda National Commission for UNESCO. (2012). *Count down to 2015: Is Uganda on track? Assessment of progress to attainment of EFA goals in Uganda*. Kampala
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner and E. Souberman, (Eds). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Daniels, H. (2004). Activity theory, discourse and Bernstein. *Educational Review*, 56(2), 121-132. Retrieved January 10, 2005 from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/cedr/2004/0000002/art00003;jsession=2d3jubf9m7dna.victoria>.
- Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Grenfell, M., & James, D. (1998). *Bourdieu and education: Acts of practical theory*. London: Falmer Press.
- Stephens, D. (2000). Girls and basic education in Ghana: A Cultural inquiry. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(1), 29-47. Retrieved December 2, 2004 from www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev
- Bunwaree, S. (1999). Gender inequality: The Mauritian experience. In C. Heward and S. Bunwaree, (Eds), *Gender, education and development: Beyond access to Empowerment* (pp. 135-154). London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Rose, P., & Tembon, M. (1999). Girls and schooling in Ethiopia. In C. Heward and S. Bunwaree, (Eds), *Gender, education and development: Beyond access to empowerment*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 85-100.
- Colclough, C., Rose, P., & Tembon, M. (2000). Gender inequalities in primary schooling: The roles of diverse cultural practice. *International Journal for Educational Development*, 20(1), 5-27. Retrieved December 2, 2004 from www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev
- Muranga, F. (2000). An evaluation of the impact of different cultures on the education of girls: A case study of Soga and Langi. In A. Thody and E. S. M. Kaabwe, (Eds), *Educating Tomorrow: Lessons from managing girls' education in Africa*. Cape Town: Juta, 177-190.
- Strauss, C. (1992). Models and motives. In R. D'Andrade and C. Strauss, (Eds). *Human motives and cultural models*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1-20.
- Al-Samarrai, S., & Peasgood, T. (1998). Educational attainments and household characteristics in Tanzania. *Economics of Education Review*, 17(4), 395-417.
- Rose, P., & Al-Samarrai, S. (2001). Household constraints on schooling by gender: Empirical evidence from Ethiopia. *Comparative Education*

Review, 45(1), 36-63. Retrieved December 9, 2004 from

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/CER/journal/issues/v45n1/CERv45p36/CERv45p36.w>

Kwesiga, J.C. (2002). *Women's access to higher education in Africa: Uganda's experience*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Bredie, J. W. B., & Beeharry, G. K. (1998). *School enrollment decline in Sub-Saharan Africa: Beyond the supply constraint*. World Bank, 395.

Madhavan, S., & Thomas, K. (2005). Early childbearing and schooling: New evidence from South Africa. *Comparative Education Review*, 49 (4) 452-467

Kirungi, F. (2000). Uganda tackling school bottlenecks: After rapid primary growth, focus shifts to quality and secondary education. *Africa Recovery*, 14(2), Retrieved May8, 2007